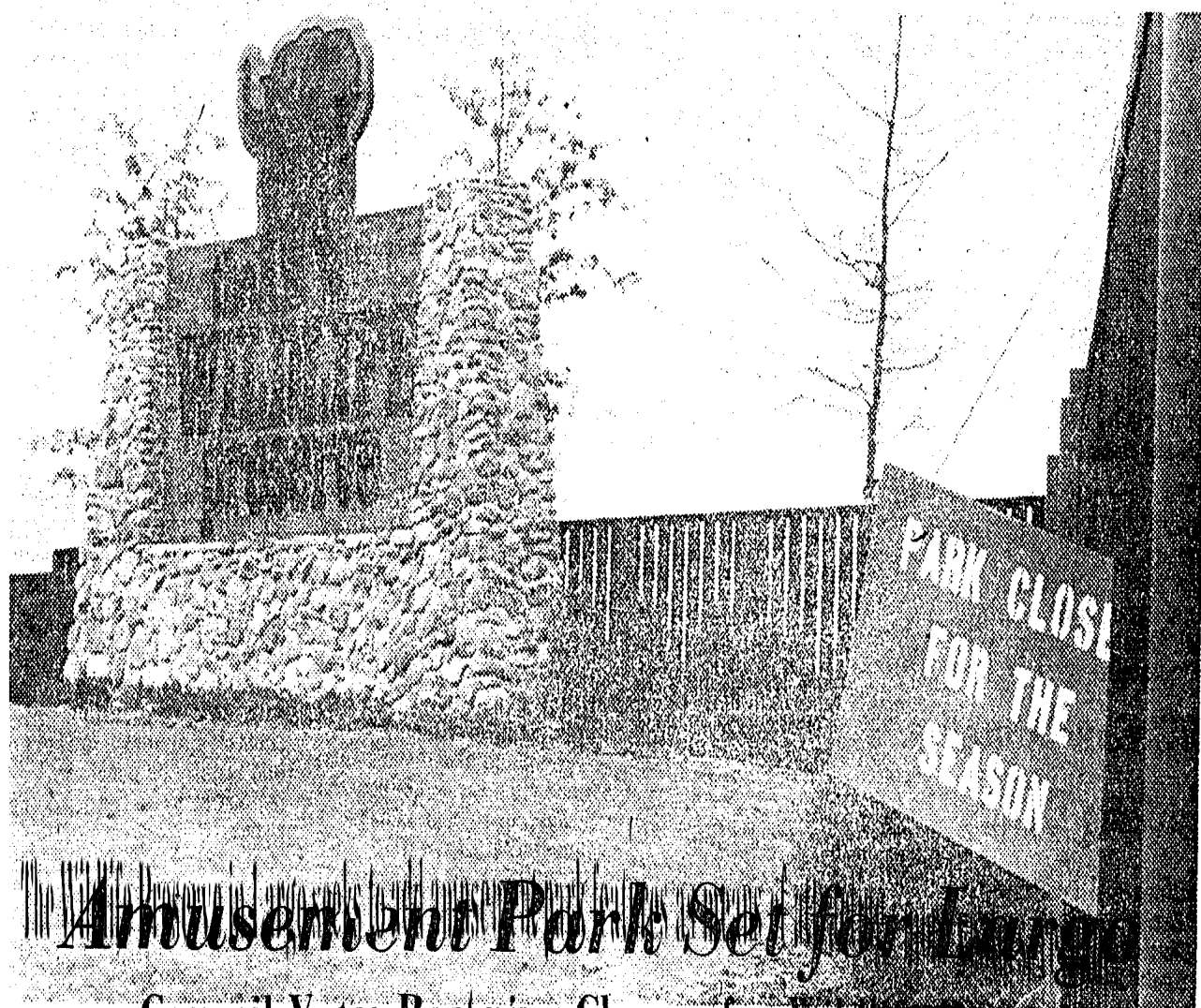


# Amusement Park Set for Largo: Council Votes Rezoning Change for ...

By Karen DeYoung Washington Post Staff Writer

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## Amusement Park Set for Largo Council Votes Rezoning Change for Wildlife Preserve

By Ken Felt - The Washington Post

By Karen DeYoung

Washington Post Staff Writer

The Prince George's County Council yesterday approved a zoning amendment that would allow ABC Scenic Attractions, Inc., owner of The Wildlife Preserve in Largo, to build a \$30 million theme amusement park on the 405-acre site of the money-losing wildlife facility.

ABC requested the new zoning to create a special exception allowing commercial recreational attractions to exist in ruraly zoned areas. The firm has outlined plans for a theme park that would be a direct competitor to similar facilities in the area, such as Virginia's Kings Dominion and Busch's Old Country parks.

Plans for the theme park, which still must be approved by the park and planning commission, zoning examiner and the Council, include a simulated South American

town, an American logging camp, a colonial square and a fabricated mountain with amusement rides.

ABC officials said the theme park, which they expect to draw a maximum of 14,000 visitors each day, would generate \$1 million in annual tax revenue for the county, in addition to providing jobs for 250 to 300 full-time workers and 1,500 seasonal workers. Officials said a 1978 completion date for the project was a "ball park figure."

Several citizens' groups in communities bordering the ABC property objected to the special exception zoning on grounds that Central Avenue (Rte. 214), which runs in front of the present wildlife preserve, was unable to handle additional traffic. Central Avenue has been given priority for upgrading by the County Council, but state highway officials have indicated that, with present

financial restrictions on road-building, it will take at least eight years to get funds for that road improvement.

ABC marketing official Michael T. Donahoe said the wildlife park, which opened in July, 1974, was "not financially viable, based on the last year and a half of performance."

"Wild animal parks are no longer in vogue," Donahoe said. "We got in at the peak of their popularity, but it was also the beginning of the downhill slide. We offered an educational experience, and found out that guests want to be entertained and excited instead."

The wildlife park has been closed since Oct. 12, and Donahoe yesterday refused to give The Washington Post permission to photograph the facilities. "Everything is already stripped down. The animals are in winterized holding areas, or have been

transported down to our other properties in Florida," he said.

The park was criticized earlier in the year after an article in a local magazine pictured animals "winterized" in small, dark cages for months at a time.

The article also criticized the wildlife park's "petting zoo" concept, where visitors were allowed to pet and hold exotic beasts, saying it caused an abnormally high animal death rate.

Donahoe cited that article, which appeared in the May issue of The Washingtonian magazine as an example of the kind of "misinterpretation" that occurs when picture-taking by the media is allowed. He stressed that the park had been inspected on several occasions and that the highest standards of animal care were maintained.

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# **Amusement Park Set For Largo**

**PRINCE, From B1**

ABC also owns and operates the highly successful Silver Springs and Weeki Wachee family entertainment parks in Florida, in addition to The Historic Towne of Smithville in New Jersey.

Meanwhile, in the last sessions of the current legislative year the Council Monday and yesterday passed a bill that would raise taxi rates in the county to 90 cents for the first four-sevenths of a mile and 10 cents for each additional one-seventh of a mile. Previous rates were 90 cents for the first five-sixths of a mile. Fifty cents will be charged for each additional passenger, and an additional 50 cents for each additional passenger transported over the county line.

A new section to the county landlord-tenant code requires landlords to provide that lease agreements, for apartments located within flood hazard areas contain an acknowledgement of flooding danger.